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Integrating key work skills in language modules

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Integrating key work skills into an undergraduate language module: marketing and media in France

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Abstract

'Marketing and the Media in France' is a final-year undergraduate module which integrates the development of key or transferable skills with the acquisition of subject-specific knowledge (of marketing and the advertising media in France) and the development of all four language skills. This case study provides an outline of the module, its aims and assessment methods, introduces some of the resources used to support the module and reviews student responses regarding the challenges and benefits of integrating key skills into a final-year module as they prepare to make the transition into the world of work.

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Languages in Higher Education Conference 2008: transitions and connections

This paper was originally presented at our conference: [transitions and connections](#), 8-9 July 2008.

Introduction

The need to emphasize how language study at degree level enhances students' key (or transferable or generic) skills in areas such as communication, numeracy and the use of information and communication technologies (commonly described as the main skills) and in problem-solving, improving students' own learning and performance and working with others (referred to as the wider skills) has been recognized for some time. The subject benchmark statement for languages and related studies includes these 'generic skills' in the range of skills, knowledge and understanding to be acquired by graduate linguists. Many of these same skills now feature in lists of attributes for employability such as the following, adopted by the Pedagogy for Employability Group:

- imagination/creativity
- adaptability/flexibility
- willingness to learn
- independent working/autonomy
- working in a team
- ability to manage others
- ability to work under pressure
- good oral communication
- communication in writing for varied purposes/audiences
- numeracy
- attention to detail
- time management
- assumption of responsibility for making decisions
- planning, coordinating and organising ability

'Marketing and the Media in France' is a final-year French module, first introduced in 2001, of which the aims and learning outcomes are expressed in terms of the acquisition of key skills as well as linguistic skills and factual

knowledge. It is intended that students should develop

- their knowledge and understanding of the fields of marketing and the media in France and of associated terms and concepts
- their language skills (through discussions, oral presentations, report-writing and detailed analysis of marketing/media material)
- their key work skills (e.g. communication and presentation skills, team working and the use of IT)

This explicit statement of a mixed-skills approach may have been unique within the department at the time of the module's introduction but is entirely consistent with the distinctive 'multi-faceted' and 'multidisciplinary' qualities of university-level language learning.

The case

'Marketing and the Media in France' is a 20-credit module, requiring a total of 200 hours of 'student learning and activity time', of which 30 are formal contact hours (lectures, seminars and group tutorials) and the remainder intended for individual and directed study (background reading, preparation and reading time associated with contact hours and assessments).

The design of the module was informed partly by the desire to integrate key skills more explicitly but also by student feedback on versions of a business French module offered some years previously. This earlier module had adopted a wide-ranging, partly historical, approach and student comments in module evaluation questionnaires suggested that they often found the nature and scope of the content difficult to deal with. Limiting module content to aspects of marketing has turned out to be a solution which defines the module in a clear and coherent way but also makes it possible to integrate key skills whilst also promoting 'deep' learning through an approach which includes problem-solving exercises of the kind students may encounter in job interviews and future training.

The main topic areas eventually selected, in consultation with a colleague in the University business school, were:

- market research
- the marketing mix and
- branding

These three areas lead students to consider topics such as: segmentation and positioning (in terms of markets and products); qualitative and quantitative approaches to market research (and the different types of data they yield); the design and development of products and packaging; distribution methods; promotional activities (for example, direct marketing, promotions, events and sponsorship); brand image and identity. These areas and sub-topics require students to understand key marketing concepts and terminology which can then be applied to the analysis of current examples and in the group tasks.

In parallel with this coverage of three broader areas of marketing there is an additional tighter focus on advertising and the advertising media (*les grands médias*) as a key ingredient in the marketing mix. This allows students to make some connections with existing subject knowledge (acquired in core language and content modules in the first and second years) and with their year-abroad experience. The various advertising media-

- press
- outdoor advertising
- television
- radio
- cinema
- Internet

- are considered in turn and, again, students can apply their knowledge to the analysis of up-to-date case studies and also consider how some of these advertising media might feature in their final group task.

Assessment

Since the introduction of this module, the department has moved from a combination of formative and summative assessment to summative-only assessment in so-called 'content' modules. In a module which aims to develop a different range of skills and knowledge and uses less familiar types of task and modes of assessment, there was clearly a danger that students would feel unprepared for what were now comparatively 'high-stake' assessments. For this reason, some elements of formative assessment were retained. They are of various kinds and all intended to allow feedback to be prepared quickly and delivered promptly whilst also encouraging students to reflect on their own learning:

- self-evaluation checklists are used for every task, formative and summative, and encourage students to assess their own work against the assessment criteria before submission
- short individual PowerPoint assignments, produced following training in using the software, receive brief written feedback, are posted on the virtual learning environment (Blackboard), judged by fellow students in a competition (with a small prize for the winner)
- individual case-study presentations receive very brief oral feedback from teachers at the end of each seminar
- individual oral performances in the first group presentation also receive brief written feedback and students view the video recording of their presentation to assess their performance for themselves
- regular 10-minute group tutorials are offered to ensure that teams are working well and all members contributing

Both class activities and assessments have been designed so that students are more likely to engage with module content in a variety of ways which encourage them to adopt a 'deep' approach to the construction of knowledge and to apply this knowledge in a variety of settings. The summative assessment of the module is now in four parts and, again, sequenced to allow the first two tasks to have a formative role when students come to prepare for the last two:

- two group reports and presentations are produced in response to problem-solving tasks, similar to those set in management training courses and used in company training schemes
- a two-hour written examination requires students to produce (i) an essay combining theoretical knowledge with analysis of up-to-date case studies and (ii) a contextualised commentary on a recent press or poster campaign.

The first group task requires students to research the context and critically evaluate an image from a press or poster campaign; it has a formative role both in preparing students for the second group presentation and report (particularly with regard to key skills) but also for the Section B commentary in the final examination. The first essay allows students to test out their approach to a more conventional task in preparation for Section A of the final examination. The second group task requires students to adopt an integrated approach to the application of thematic knowledge and linguistic and key skills, working as a team. The final examination tests thematic knowledge and linguistic skills on an individual basis.

Assessment component	Length	Weighting
Group presentation and report 1	1000 words	10%
Essay	1000 words	10%
Group presentation and report 2	2000 words	40% (oral 20%, report 20%)
Exam (2 hours)	2000 words	40% (essay 20%, commentary 20%)

Resources and skills development

Students generally seem satisfied with the amount of help, guidance and information they receive and the university's VLE plays an important role here. Blackboard is used extensively for module delivery throughout the university and, in a module which draws heavily on audio and video material, has proved a valuable tool: firstly, for posting information and resources such as

- student presentations
- lecture outlines
- seminar questions
- task briefs
- images, video and audio clips
- web and library links

and, secondly, for communication and collaboration by means of

- e-mails and announcements
- group pages and
- a discussion board

Using and contributing to the VLE is one way in which a module such as 'Marketing and the Media in France' can encourage students to develop their ICT skills. The ready availability of extensive, authentic and up-to-date resources in French intended both for marketing and advertising professionals and for a general audience is an attractive feature of marketing as an area of study and encourages students to develop their research skills online. They quickly discover the importance of searching efficiently, of evaluating and interpreting, selecting and

presenting material and resources carefully and accurately. The fact that they can easily incorporate authentic material in a range of formats into their case-study presentations and assessments increases the interest and appeal of these tasks for presenters and for their audience and encourages a professional approach to the organisation and presentation of the content in general. (A list of resources for studying marketing and the media in France is included in the bibliography at the end of this article.)

Similarly, the capabilities of presentation software encourage students to adopt a professional and creative approach whilst also developing their ICT skills. In the early years of the module the use of presentation software was introduced through a training session by a tutor from the University's Information Technology Service. Nowadays it is offered by the module's teachers, supported by independent learning materials devised by the ITS and by the software manufacturers. Although it has become commonplace to criticise the use of presentation software as 'death by bullet point', we have found that, as long as students are encouraged to focus on presenting content simply and clearly, coherently and accurately, it is an effective tool for encouraging them to develop and demonstrate higher-level cognitive skills such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

The extensive use of group work has been a key feature of the module from its earliest days and the proportion of the final module mark derived from group tasks now stands at 30%. Although it is an aspect of the module about which students admit to having some concerns as the module begins, by the end of the module they are happy to acknowledge that it is an appropriate and effective method of assessment.

Student response

Student evaluations over the years have always been favourable and, now that issues relating to workload (initially perceived to be heavy) have been resolved, extremely enthusiastic. The areas on which students comment are interesting in general terms and reveal that they attach great importance to matters such as the clear structure and organisation of a module, the relevance and interest of content, availability of resources, prompt and helpful feedback, tutorial support and a good atmosphere in classes. Without prompting, however, they have always referred to the value of the module in terms of developing key skills and employability, usually singling out the group tasks as 'hard work but very rewarding'. The following comments are typical:

- 'Excellent opportunity to develop public-speaking skills, written French and teamwork skills.'
- 'Gave us an opportunity to develop valuable personal and work skills which have greatly helped confidence as well as organisation and language learning. Particularly appreciate chance to develop IT and team-working skills.'
- 'The group work was really enjoyable, a lot of hard work, very interesting – learning made fun. It is directly relevant to life after university so a perfect fourth-year module. '
- 'Very useful module, real world applications, developed transferable skills, challenging, improved speaking confidence in French.'
- 'A very enjoyable module. Excellent use of team-work – I have really enjoyed this and gained a lot from it. Great use of PowerPoint and other transferable skills.'

In a more focused questionnaire this year students were explicitly asked to comment on the extent to which they felt the module helped them with their key skills. Responses rated the module very highly with all agreeing – and most 'strongly agreeing' – that the module had helped them to improve in the areas mentioned.

We were also surprised to discover that, not only do the students rate the module highly in terms of the development of their oral and written communication skills in the target language, but they actually rate it more highly than the equivalent core-language module.

This module has helped me to improve	Mean scores (out of maximum of 5.0)
my presentation skills	4.67
my skill in using presentation software	4.63
my ability to work in a team	4.52
my ability to manage my time	4.22
my ability to conduct research	4.26
my oral skills in the TL	4.42
my written skills in the TL	4.42

Although the module did not originally set out to assess all the commonly-accepted key skills (as the learning outcomes originally formulated in 2001 and quoted above make clear), it now seems that the approach adopted and the tasks set do indeed allow students to work - to a greater or lesser extent - on the full range of skills and,

indeed, of 'employability attributes'.

The group tasks encourage students to use and develop their ICT, research and presentation skills to good effect – the reports are generally based on very detailed research into a wide range of sources and the presentations are clear, coherent and draw on the capabilities of the software to an impressive extent.

But it has also been interesting to see how the group tasks seem to promote a more team-oriented approach to other aspects of this and other modules - group members often become 'buddies', sharing formative feedback on individual tasks, pooling ideas and resources and studying together in preparation for written exams.

Other aspects of the module have had unexpected consequences in terms of the development of key skills. The increased use of self-evaluation checklists, for example, and of tutorials as an occasion to review their own performance (via video recordings of their presentations) means that students have additional opportunities to develop as self-aware and effective learners.

The fact that the summative presentations are given to an audience of other module members (as well as being recorded) makes additional demands of a kind often required in a professional context. No group so far has failed to submit their report or give their presentation at the appointed time but, as debriefs and module evaluation questionnaires make clear, this often requires group members to work under fairly intense pressure to meet their deadlines. And there is added motivation to prepare well, to work as a team and to pay attention to detail, knowing that fellow students will be asking questions.

Over time, inspired perhaps by examples of projects produced by module members in previous years, the evidence grows stronger of students approaching the second, more open, group task not just as the occasion to demonstrate their problem-solving ability but to do so with imagination and creativity.

Finally, even numeracy, the skill which does not figure at all in the 'generic skills' listed in the subject benchmark statement for languages and related studies, is called upon to some extent – students draw upon statistical evidence from government agencies, businesses and market research organizations and seek to interpret and apply this to their chosen product or service and context. (We think that there is further scope for enhancing this aspect of the module by introducing more rigorous requirements with regard to the costing of campaigns or strategies presented in the second group task.)

All in all, the module seems to have proved its value and appeal by requiring students to acquire knowledge and understanding consistent with the typical standard laid down by the subject benchmark statement (with regard to intercultural competence and thematic knowledge) but also the ability to 'apply effectively and appropriately their language skills in a professional context' and to demonstrate a range of key or 'generic' skills.

- 'I think that this is a very good module to offer students in terms of future employability. I liked the way we did group work. I acquired and developed new skills which will be useful.'

Bibliography

Quality Assurance Agency (2007). *Subject Benchmark Statement: Languages and Related Studies*. Web version www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/statements/languages07.asp

The Pedagogy for Employability Group (2006). *Pedagogy for Employability*, York: The Higher Education Academy. Web version www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/York/documents/ourwork/tla/employability/id383_pedagogy_for_employability_357.pdf

Resources for studying marketing and the media in France:

Books:

Bouchez, Antoine, Stéphane Pihier and Joël Clair (2005). *Précis de marketing*. Paris : Nathan. (A compact, affordable text, regularly revised and updated. Each two-page spread reviews the key points of a topic and provides a case study or relevant background.)

Lendrevie, Jacques, Arnaud de Baynast and Catherine Emprin (2008). *Publicitor: Communication 360° off et on line*. Paris: Dunod

Lendrevie, Jacques and Denis Lindon (2003). *Mercator Paris: Dalloz*. Two substantial authoritative texts, regularly revised and updated, supported by a website with interactive study material www.mercator-publicitor.fr

Mermet, Gérard (2006). *Franco-scopie 2007*. Paris: Larousse. (A lively overview of the most recent research into consumer trends and behaviour, amply illustrated by graphs, statistics and images from recent advertising campaigns. Again, regularly revised and updated.)

Newspapers and journals:

Weekly journals for marketing professionals, providing up-to-date reporting on current developments in marketing and communication, short case studies on innovative and award-winning campaigns, supported by websites with archives with good search facilities:

[Stratégies and](#)

www.strategies.fr

[CB News and](#)

www.cbnews.fr

Daily newspapers providing good reporting of business news and searchable archives on the corresponding websites:

[Les Echos and](#)

www.lesechos.fr

[Le Monde and](#)

www.lemonde.fr

Related links

Regular programmes on business and advertising, down-loadable from websites:

[Culture Pub – weekly programme downloadable from web](#)

www.culturepub.fr

[Rue des Entrepreneurs – weekly radio programme on France Inter available as a podcast](#)

www.radiofrance.fr/franceinter/em/ruedesentrepreneurs/pres.php

Selected web resources on marketing in France:

[Ipsos – market research information on a wide range of topics](#)

www.ipsos.fr/CanalIpsos/index.asp

[Popai France \(Institut Français de la Communication et de la Publicité sur le Lieu de Vente\) – information on 'point of sale' information and advertising](#)

www.popai.fr

[Prodimarques – a site dedicated to brands and branding](#)

www.prodimarques.com

[Fevad \(La Fédération du e-commerce et de la vente à distance\) – a site dedicated to e-commerce and direct marketing](#)

www.fevad.com

[Cles-promo – 'Le site des professionnels de la promotion des ventes et du marketing opérationnel en grande consommation' – a site dedicated to sales promotion techniques with numerous case studies](#)

www.cles-promo.com

[Admical – 'carrefour du mécénat d'entreprise' – the site of an organisation concerned with the various forms of sponsorship](#)

www.admical.org/home.asp

Selected web resources on advertising media in France:

[APPM \(Association pour la Promotion de la Presse Magazine\) – promotes magazines as an advertising medium](#)

www.pressemagazine.com

[Clear Channel France – includes information on different types of outdoor advertising](#)

www.clearchannel.fr/site/actu.asp?id_actu=345&frame=actu

[Médiamétrie – 'La mesure d'audience et l'études des medias audiovisuels et interactifs' – market research and other statistical information on television, radio and internet](#)

www.mediametrie.fr

[Effie France – site of Prix Effie \(for advertising effectiveness\), containing numerous case studies of successful campaigns, television and other media](#)

www.effie.fr

[SIRRP \(Syndicat Indépendant des Régies de Radios Privées\) – information on radio advertising, prizewinning campaigns from the Grand Prix Radio](#)

www.mediaradio.fr

[Screenvision – information on cinema advertising](#)

www.screenvision.fr/site/fra/fra_index.php

[Le Journal du Net – news and information on e-commerce, communication and marketing on-line](#)

www.journaldunet.com